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ABSTRACT

This mini-text is a set of classroom ready Latin readings, a selection of Martial's epigrams complete with Latin-English vocabularies and reading notes. The readings concern the Roman holiday Saturnalia, at which time the Romans exchanged gifts and favors. The first epigram, Xenia (gifts), gives the reason for the following epigrams, which are about particular gifts: peacocks, purple fish, deer, ointment, roses, bookcase, parchment pocket edition of Vergil, parchment pocket edition of Cicero, and a volume of Catullus' poetry. The material was prepared for a mini-course at Indiana University on the poet Martial and Roman daily life. (Author/CFM)

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# THE POET MARTIAL AND ROMAN DAILY LIFE

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NŌN SEMPER SĀTVRNĀLIA ERVNT

## IŌ SĀTVRNĀLIA!

I. Xenia (XIII.iii)

II. Pāvōnēs (XIII.lxx)

III. Mūricēs (XIII.lxxxvii)

IV. Dammae (XIII.xciv)

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This selection of Martial's epigrams is related to the Sāturnālia. They give us a variety of insights into the gifts and favors the Romans exchanged in this holiday period. The epigrams in Book XIII were called Xenia, "gifts"; those in Book XIV were called Apophorēta, "dinner favors".

> (These epigrams) were published at the Saturnalia of 84 or 85 (perhaps one collection appeared in each of these years). The separate pieces were intended as sentiments or labels attached to gifts at the Saturnalia or to favors given to guests at dinner; they thus represent the earliest stage of the epigram, being in theory written on the gift itself. For such a purpose they would find a ready sale. Nearly all the Xenia are for presents that cater to the needs of the inner man.
>
> Edwin Post. Selected Epigrams of Martial. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1908, 1967): p. 317.

The first epigram is a rationale for the volume, the rest are the actual "labels" or "gift tags.

## I. Xenia

Omnis in hōc gracilī Xeniōrum turba libellō
constābit nummīs quattuor ēmpta tibi.
Quattuor est nimium? poterit constāre duobus
et faciet lūcrum bibliopōla Tryphon.
Haec licet hospitibus pro mūnere distīcha mittas,
sī tibi tam rārus, quam mihi, nummus erit.

xenium, -ī n: present, gift
gracilis, -e: thin, slender, slight; simple, unadorned
turba, -ae f: throng, mob, group, crowd, number, lot
libellus, -ī m: small book, pamphlet
constō, stitī, -stātum, 1: cost
nummus, -ī m: coin, sesterce (about 5¢)
emō, ēmī, ēmptum, 3: buy, purchase
nimium adv: too much, too, excessively
lūcrum, -ī n: profit, gain, advantage
bibliopōla, -ae m: bookseller, bookdealer, publisher
licet, -uit, -itum, 2, imp: it is permitted (allowed, lawful); one may (can)
hospes, -itis m: host, visitor, guest, friend
mūnus, -eris n: job, duty; gift, present
distīcha, -ae f: poem of two lines, distich
rārus, -a, -um: scattered, few, rare, infrequent

2. nummīs quattuor: The price is low, but if we recall how cheaply slaves were sold and that a single reader could dictate to a large number of slave copyists, there is little reason to question this price.
4. et = et tamen
bibliopōla Tryphon: Tryphon was also Quintilian's publisher.



5

4.

Addita per titulōs sua nōmina rēbus habēbis:

praetereas, sī quid nōn facit ad stomachum.

Martial XIII.iii

addō, -didī, additum, 3: add to, put to, increase
titulus, -ī m: title, label, inscription
praetereō, -īre, -iī, -itum: pass by, pass over, omit, overlook, disregard
stomachus, -ī m: stomach; taste, liking

7 titulōs: the lemmata or titles of the various couplets. The lemmata used for the epigrams in Book XIII are genuine. (lemma, -atis n: theme, topic, subject)
rēbus: the various objects described in the book.

## II. Pāvōnēs

This is a protest against the eating of a bird as beautiful as the peacock. Since this couplet was to be attached to the gift, a very expensive and a highly prized gift, it should not be taken too seriously. In Varro's time, a single peacock egg cost five dēnāriī (about $1.00) and a whole bird was worth fifty dēnāriī (about $10.00). We know from Varro and Columella that the Romans raised these birds extensively.

Mīrāris quotiēns gemmantīs explicit ālās

et potes hunc saevō tradere, dūre, cocō?

Martial XIII.lxx

2. et = et tamen

pāvō, -ōnis m: peacock
mīror 1 dep: marvel at, wonder at, be amazed at, feel awe (astonishment)
quotiēns adv: how many times, how often; as often as
gemmō 1: be jeweled, glitter, sparkle; bud out; be set with gems
explicō 1: unfold, unfurl, loosen, spread out
āla, -ae f: wing
saevus, -a, -um: fierce, savage, ferocious
trādō, -didī, -ditum, 3: hand over, give up, surrender, commit
dūrus, -a, -um: shameless, harsh, crude, cruel
cocus (coquus), -ī m: cook

## III. Mūricēs

This epigram represents a gift we might never have anticipated. It is written from the standpoint of the mūrices themselves, a device Martial often uses in these couplets.

Sanguine dē nostrō tīnctās, ingrāte, lacernās

induis, et nōn est hoc satis: ēsca sumus.

Martial XIII.lxxxvii

mūrex, -icis m: purple fish, murex; purple dye
sanguis, -inis m: blood
tingō, tīnxī, tīnctum, 3: wet; dye, color, tint, stain
lacerna, -ae f: cloak, shawl
induō, -uī, ūtum, 3: put on, clothe, wear, assume
ēsca, -ae f: food; bait

1. Sanguine...nostrō = purpura.
   Ingrate: in sense of "instead of being grateful, you eat us."
2. esca sumus: the mollusk from which the purple dye was extracted was edible.

## IV. Dammae

The custom of giving food delicacies has persisted through time. Today's Christmas gifts include cheeses, meats, and fruit. Here Martial speaks as the dammae in an ironic label for a gift.

Dente timētur aper, dēfendunt cornua cervum:

inbellēs dammae quid nisi praeda sumus?

Martial XIII.xciv

damma, -ae f: deer, antelope, chamois, elk, venison
aper, aprī m: wild boar
cornū, -ūs n: horn, antler
cervus, -ī m: stag, buck
inbellis (imbellis), -e: unwarlike, peaceloving, powerless, feeble
nisi conj: if not, unless, except, only
praeda, -ae f: booty, spoils, loot, prey, game

1. Dente: "tusk"

## V. Unguentum

In this couplet Martial is urging his reader to be an Epicurean in the sense that Horace was one and to use his resources for self-enjoyment.

Unguentum hērēdī numquam nec vīna relinquas:

ille habeat nummōs, haec tibi tōta datō.

Martial XIII.cxxvi

unguentum, -ī n: ointment; perfume, cologne, scent
hērēs, -ēdis m & f: heir, heiress, successor
relinquō, relīquī, relictum, 3: leave, bequeath, hand down, pass on
nummus, -ī m: coin, cash, money
tōtus, -a, -um: whole, entire, all

1. unguentum and vīna = the good things and pleasures in life.
2. nummos: i.e. only "the money you are not able to spend for food or drink or in some other way on yourself."
   datō: future imperative

## VI. Corōnae Roseae

Post points out that there was a steady demand for roses at Rome, especially in connection with dinners. He says that the demand was so great that even the rose farms at Paestum could not keep up with it, even though the plants bloomed twice a year.

Dat festīnātās, Caesar, tibi brūma corōnās:

quondam vēris erat, nunc tua facta rosa est.

Martial XIII.cxxvii

festīnō 1: hurry up, speed up
brūma, -ae f: winter, wintertime
quondam adv: once, formerly, heretofore, previously
vēr, vēris n: spring, springtime; product of spring

1. festīnātās: "forced," freely, "early". The wreaths were made of roses raised in hothouses.
   Caesar = Domitian.

These couplets from Book XIII were written to accompany dinner favors (apophorēta) which the guests carried away in their napkins (mappae). This type of gift giving was especially popular at the time of the Saturnalia.

## VII. Scrīnium

Here Martial speaks as if he himself were the scrīnium, a bookcase or holder which was cylindrical in shape.

Selectōs nisi das mihi libellōs,

admittam tineās trucesque blattās.

Martial XIV.xxxvii

scrīnium, -(i)ī n: bookcase, chest, box, file
nisi conj: if not, unless, except, only
libellus, -ī m: small book, pamphlet, booklet
tinea, -ae f: borer, worm, bookworm
trux, -icis: savage, wild, fierce, ferocious
blatta, -ae f: cockroach

1. Selectōs: i.e. few and choice.
   mihi: the scrīnium is speaking.

## VIII. Vergilius in Membrānīs

The gift here is a miniature or "pocket" edition of Vergil. Since one could write on both sides of parchment and in a very fine hand, which was difficult on papyrus if not impossible, a small parchment book could hold a great deal.

Quam brevis immēnsum cēpit membrāna Marōnem!

ipsius vultūs prīma tabella gerit!

Martial XIV.clxxxvi

membrāna, -ae f: membrane, skin; parchment, vellum
quam adv: how, how much
brevis, -e: small, narrow, brief
immēnsus, -a, -um: boundless, immense, vast, immeasurable
capiō, cēpī, captum, 3: take hold of, grasp, contain, capture, be large enough for
Marō, -ōnis m: Publius Vergilius Maro
vultus, -ūs m: face, countenance, features
tabella, -ae f: tablet, painting, picture, page
gerō, gessī, gestum, 3: carry, bear, wear, bring, produce

1. immēnsum: "voluminous;" note the antithesis with brevis.

## IX. Cicerō in Membrānīs

Martial is recommending a parchment "pocket" edition of Cicero as a fine traveling companion. There is no way of knowing how much or which works of Cicero would be in such an edition.

SĪ comes ista tibi fuerit membrāna, putātō
carpere tē longās cum Cicerōne viās.

Martial XIV.clxxxviii

membrāna, -ae f: membrane, skin; parchment, vellum
comes, -itis m & f: (wayside, traveling) companion, comrade, partner
iste, -a, -ud pron: this, that, such, of such a kind
carpō, -psī, -ptum, 3: pick, seize, snatch; enjoy, exhaust
Cicerō, -ōnis m: Marcus Tullius Cicero

1. putātō: future imperative
2. carpere...viās: may be used in sense of "travel" or in sense of "enjoy".

## X. Catullus

This is a lovely tribute, included, in all likelihood, with a slim parchment volume of Catullus' poetry.

Tantum magna suō dēbet Vērōna Catullō,
quantum parva suō Mantua Vergiliō.

Martial XIV.cxcv

Catullus, -ī m: Valerius Catullus
tantum...quantum: as much...as

1. magna...Vērōna: Verona was large only in comparison with tiny Mantua.
   suō: "her beloved"